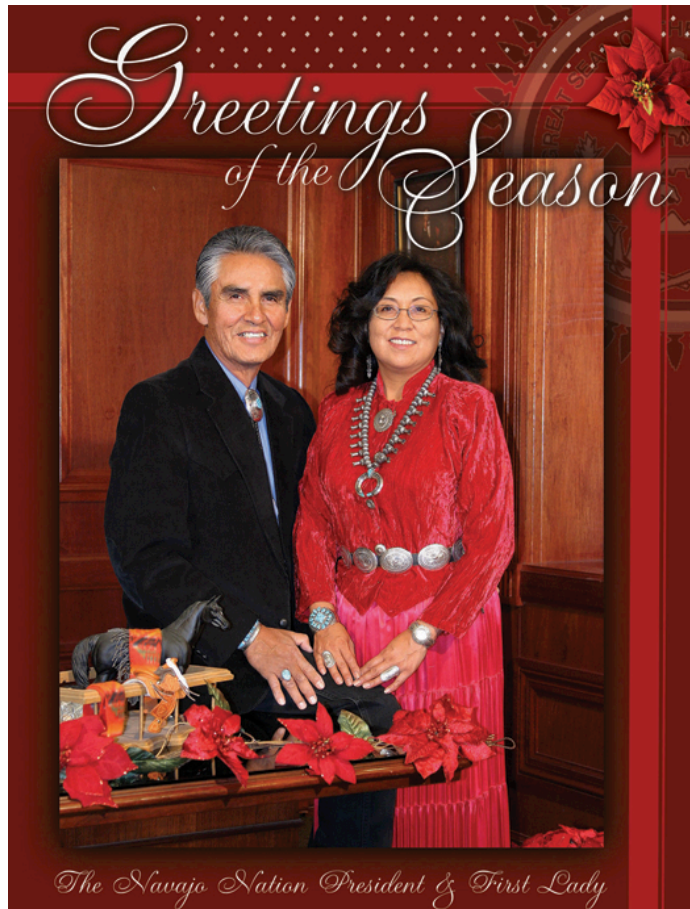


# *A Christmas Message*

*From*

*Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.*

*& First Lady Vikki Shirley*



*And the angel said unto them,*

*"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."*

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*

**Yá'át'ééh Keshmish!** The Navajo people have been blessed with the first blanketing of snow across Navajoland just before Christmas. We offer our gratitude for the moisture and beauty that comes with the winter season while it is always our prayer that our people travel safely wherever they go.

Now the season of such blessings and gratitude has come with the changes that bring our winter stories and ceremonies, our college students arriving home for the holidays, and the family celebrations we enjoy at Christmastime and the New Year.

On occasion, we are asked whether Navajos celebrate Christmas as other people do. Whether we pray with corn pollen, *azee*, or attend a church, the answer is, "Of course, we do," although it has not always been so.

History tells us that for most of the world, the birth of Christ as Christmas was not celebrated as it is today. The joyous holiday that we know today, with gift-giving, Santa Claus, and the excitement of children, began to emerge in early-1800s America. Our modern concept of Santa comes from the images of the gift bringers St. Nicholas and Kriss Kringle. Then, more than 100 years ago, American political cartoonist Thomas Nast created the figure of Santa as chubby, happy and jolly with red cheeks, red clothes, and flowing white whiskers. Even the U.S. Congress did not declare Christmas an official federal holiday until 1870. By then, people were placing wire and shiny foil on their Christmas trees, and decorating them with glass ornaments.

Today, people throughout the world, and certainly Navajos, have come to think of Christmas in terms of Santa and presents under the tree. But it wasn't that way in our grandparents' day. Navajos are a prayerful people, and the expression of gratitude for good thoughts, good health and good things is our teaching. We're thankful to the Creator for the breath we take, for the day we're given, and for the gifts we receive that make life meaningful and joyful.

Among these gifts is love, and love is the meaning of Christmas. The Christian teaching is that a Holy Child who is the Son of God was born on Christmas. His message for the world is of love, of peace and of goodwill. His instruction to his disciples and to all who will hear is to love thy neighbor. That is and remains the simple, sacred message of Christmas. It is a teaching Navajos have always embraced, and one that can change a heart and change a world.

To all, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!